

Committee on Public Planting  
Wednesday, November 12, 2014  
5:30-7:00, DPW, 147 Hampshire St

Minutes

Present: City Arborist Dave Lefcourt, Community Development representative Gary Chan, Florrie Wescoat, Gitte Venicx, Chantal Eide, Michael Hanlon, David Davis, Thomas Flynn, Maggie Booz, Emily Axelrod, Nancy Phillips, and including Catherine Daly Woodbury (DPW), Dave Webster (DPW, Supt Parks & Forestry), Owen O'Riordan (DPW Commissioner), Vanessa Boukili (Earthwatch), and as presenters of the planting plan for 253 Walden St.: Katya Podsiadlo (Blair Hines Design Associates) and Milton Yu (Peter Quinn Assoc.)

Minutes from the meeting of October 8, 2014 meeting were accepted subject to various Action Items being added to the minutes of this November meeting

The meeting was called to order at 5:30. Minutes taken by David Davis

Agenda Items and Discussion:

1. 253 Walden Street - Pursuant to city Zoning Ordinance, Article 5, Footnote K, the Cttee reviewed the Landscape Plan for 253 Walden Street in a revised form to that which had been presented at the Cttee's monthly meeting of October 8. Katia Podsiadlo of Blair Hines Design Associates presented the revised landscape accompanied by Peter Quinn Associate's Milton Yu who had presented the landscape plan in its earlier form. The revised plan showed major changes in the landscape plan from the prior submission, all changes responsive to the Cttee's comments in October regarding species choices, locations and spacing with a particular focus on the new plan's emphasis on street trees at the back of the sidewalk on petitioners property. A vote was taken with all 8 Cttee members present voting in favor of providing the architect with a formal letter of approval of their plan, a copy of which plan will be kept on file by the City Arborist.

It is worth noting that the necessity by a landowner to obtain formal approval for the owner's landscape plan from the Committee on Public Planting is a rare occurrence, but one which 253 Walden showed can yield significant benefits.

2. Procedural Issue - a procedural issue was raised regarding 253 Walden Street, where in the interval between the Peter Quinn Assoc. presentation of October and its revised submittal of November, a Cttee member communicated by email unilaterally with the architect for 253 Walden Street offering assistance in the revision of the plan. A brief discussion followed in which it was acknowledged by all that communications of that kind must come from the Cttee or someone explicitly authorized by the Cttee to act in its behalf.

3. Arborist Updates - (a) David Lefcourt ('DL') reported that NSTAR's tree pruning crew had been 'kicked out of the city' that day for 'poor practices' in excessive and improper pruning on Market and Columbia Streets. The excessive pruning has effectively created street trees many of which may soon need to be slated for removal. DL, joined by DPW director Owen O'Riordan, expects to sit down with NSTAR and its pruning sub-contractor Asplundh to discuss the implications of their flawed work. DL, who reviews all of NSTAR's pruning work, noted that NSTAR's pruning crew has been in the city for the past two months without incident. DL agreed to inventory all trees that are of concern and provide a list of their locations to Cttee members by email.

(b) Cambridge Landscape continues with cycle pruning in North Cambridge (Walden St, Dudley, Jackson, Rindge, for example). Park and Cemetary pruning is scheduled for early December.

(c) Autumn Tree Planting - DL reports that 1/2 to 2/3 of fall tree planting is complete. There has been a delay due to new sidewalk work and the slow pace of stump grinding. Tree planting will start up on Monday the 17th and be finished in a week. 200-240 trees will have then been planted of which approximately 60 will have been planted in Structural Soil (20 in the Mass Ave Demonstration block and 45 in the Huron 'A' area of the sewer separation project)

(d) Discussion continued regarding DL's preference for planting bare root stock as opposed to Balled & Burlapped ('B&B') where bare root stock tends to have less damaged root systems and therefore establishes more quickly. Question raised about size of tree wells where spread of bare root systems in often considerably broader than that of B&B. DL assured Cttee that tree well are cut longer as circumstances dictate.

(e) Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) - 60 Ash trees have been removed in the city, which due to their poor/stressed condition, have been considered primary targets for EAB. Concern has been raised that other members of the Oleaceae Family, Ash being in that family, including Fringe Trees (*Chionanthus*) may be susceptible to EAB.

In the spring 2015 20-25 traps for EAB will be put out in Cambridge in conjunction with DCR in an effort to track EAB emergence by locale.

(f) Tree Removal - debate continues regarding a prominent Oak at Linnean and Washington Street as to whether or not it is a risk and should be taken down. Further investigation will be conducted by DPW using an aerial bucket.

(g) Fogg Museum tree planting failures recently attributed to underground gas leaks, which are now being examined.

(h) Mass Ave Demonstration Block trees have been planted on a block by block basis instead of in a more random order, which is preferred by DL. For example, one block is Swamp White Oak; the next block is "Skyline" Honey Locust, another "Princeton" Elm, another "GreenVase" Zelkova

4. Community Development Update - in anticipation of his regular participation in CPP meetings, Community Development's designated representative, Gary Chan, sent out an e-mail on November 5 to CPP members providing a list of projects coming before the Planning Board. With the list came the web sites for each project. In his email Gary also referenced "Cambridge Conversations"..." a series of meetings around the city throughout the summer and fall as a precursor for [ the ] upcoming citywide planning process" and the availability on line of its report.

At the meeting Gary made available hard copies of the projects for review. Despite advance notice of a week, none of the CPP membership had reviewed the sites. However, brief reviews of the materials presented at the meeting led to questions. The primary questions presented to Gary with a request for his follow up was at what point in a CDD review are planting plans reviewed, with what authority and with an eye to what detail. Importantly, how can CPP's role be enhanced in the CDD review process? Gary's provision of detailed project information a week before CPP meetings is a greatly appreciated innovation.

#### 5. Sand Based Structural Soils ('SBSS') -

DPW's Catherine Woodbury ("CW") began a presentation on the city's use of structural soils. It is expected that she will continue her presentation at the CPP's next monthly meeting on December 10. CW referred to the city's use of two categories of structural soil one from Pine and Swallow and the other from Cornell University. The category of structural soil currently used predominantly by the city in its various projects around the city was recommended by the Groton, MA based environmental consulting company, Pine and Swallow. The Pine and Swallow structural soil formula is 4 parts sand to 1 part compost to 1 part soil. CW cited the formula for its expected longevity where the claim in support of its inherent characteristics is that it should endure multiple plantings at the same site. Also referenced was its excellent capacity when compacted under sidewalks, for example, where it shows good porosity as well as good moisture retention.

The Pine and Swallow formula was compared to the Cornell formula for structural soils, which is 80% 1 inch stone and 20% soil where hydrogel is added for purposes of moisture retention and to add nutrients. Opinion is that nutrients in Cornell formula will be used up over time and soil capacity to sustain replanting in same mix will be greatly diminished.

CW will continue her presentation at meeting on December 10. She specifically requested and encouraged questions to be forwarded to her in advance of the meeting to help her in preparing for the meeting

#### ACTION ITEMS

- (a) review by Cttee members of tree species list
- (b) continuation of presentation by Catherine Woodbury on the city's choice of structural soils and discussion of dimensions of tree wells and below ground volume of soils.
- (c) continuation of discussion of mission statement

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.